

Patient safety

Doctors need relief from malpractice insurance costs. Some are quitting or moving their practice because of the costs, especially for high-risk practices like delivering babies.

We shouldn't repeat the mistakes of other states like Florida and Texas, where the insurance industry got reforms passed that limit a consumer's right to a jury trial by saying it would help doctors and patients and then raised premium costs even more. Remember, medical malpractice premium costs account for less than 1% of U.S. health care costs.

Insurance company proposals to weaken our civil justice system only make rich insurance companies richer. A better solution is to attack the problem by preventing the medical errors that lead to malpractice suits and to solve the problem of the very few bad doctors that account for the vast majority of medical errors.

And we need to clean up the way some insurance companies mismanage their underwriting by underpricing and insuring very poor risks just to get premium dollars to invest during a "bull market", and then sharply increasing premiums and reducing coverage, creating a "liability insurance crisis" during the "bear market".

What do you think?

Your opinion matters. I'd like to hear from you, whether it's a question about an issue, an idea you have for legislation or to tell your family's story.

You can contact me by phone, letter or e-mail. I read every message from citizens in the 47th District and make it a priority to respond as soon as possible.

Keeping In Touch

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Representative
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2004 Session Preview

Dear Neighbors,

Thank you for the honor and privilege of serving as your representative.

Our state is at a crossroads this year. There's a public debate about the direction we're heading, and I believe you have a right to be involved in that discussion.

Some politicians insist that the only path to prosperity is by wielding the axe, by cutting our schools and public services to put more money into our pockets today, even if that means we go into debt.

I believe that's a short-sighted and selfish vision.

We can't slash and burn our way to prosperity. We can't attract businesses by having the lowest wages and least protections against pollution – not when Third World countries pay workers pennies an hour and some nations in Africa are so desperate that they're getting paid to import toxic waste.

When our state has prospered, it's because we worked together to become the best in the world.

Our state became the world leader in airplanes, then in software. Businesses and workers here compete with corporations around the world. Winning second place isn't good enough, not when the prize is your company going kaput and all those workers who had good jobs getting up early on Sunday mornings to circle want ads.

We can't win a race to the bottom, and it's not a race worth winning. We can – and should – win a race to the top.

That means:

- the best education
- the best jobs, and
- the best health care.

This newsletter has information about those three issues and some strong reforms the Legislature should pass to restore prosperity to our communities. I hope you find it informative.

As always, I welcome ideas, comments and questions from you, and I make it a priority to read and respond to everything sent by a citizen back home. I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

GEOFF SIMPSON
State Representative, 47th District

Schools – giving our kids the best



College

A college degree is the surest ticket to the American Dream – every student or worker willing to work hard and study deserves a shot at earning that degree.

There’s a series of barriers standing in the way:

- High drop-out rates – Half the students who enter college drop out before getting their degree. And one out of three high school students drop out. That’s a huge waste of human potential and brainpower. Our goal should be having the best graduation rates in the nation.
- The incoming crush – In 2008, the largest class of high school seniors in our history will start knocking on college doors. Those doors will stay shut unless we make room for 30,000 more seats in college lecture halls and labs. It’s wrong to tell an entire generation of students they can’t earn a college degree.
- The high cost of college – Who has \$4,000 sitting in their checking account? That’s the price of tuition at our state universities. It’s \$20,000 at private colleges. Thirty years ago, you could work a part-time job to pay your way through college. You can’t today. We need strong reforms to make college more affordable for everyday families. One reform is making Promise Scholarships pay the full cost of tuition, which would fulfill the original vision of that program.

Simple majority for schools

Why can a politician claim that 55 percent of the vote is a landslide but 59 percent is a failure if it’s a school levy?

It’s time to stop raising the bar for our local schools and lowering it for common politicians.



I support a reform that treats school levies just like any other election, passing with a simple majority – 50 percent – instead of today’s supermajority requirement of 60 percent.

This is a reform that doesn’t cost any money but can do a lot to help local communities unite to fix old and overcrowded schools.

Jobs – winning the race to the top

No subsidies for exporting your job

Should your tax dollars subsidize a company that ships your job to India or China? It’s not just factory workers who worry about their jobs going overseas. Corporations are sending some of the best American jobs – including engineers and computer programmers – to workers offshore.

I support reforms to stop this practice. One way is to deny government contracts to any firm that subcontracts jobs overseas. And shouldn’t you have a right to know if the person you’re on the phone with about your computer or health insurance problem is in Bangladesh or New Delhi?



More computer, math and science grads

Microsoft is hiring thousands of new workers. Only a handful are from here in Washington state. Why? Because our colleges just don’t produce enough people with the right computer, math and science degrees.

It’s crazy to hand our state’s best jobs to people from California or Ohio while our kids get stuck brewing lattes for minimum wage. I support reforms that create more room at our colleges and universities so we can produce more graduates for those high-tech, high-paying jobs.

Traffic

Traffic gridlock is strangling our prosperity and quality of life. It’s also a huge danger to your family, since you’re three times more likely to get maimed or killed on the road than at the hands of a criminal.

Last session, we broke through partisan gridlock in Olympia and passed the first real transportation plan in 13 years. That’s a good start. It doesn’t mean the problem is solved.

A real solution will come when we fix the regional transportation plan and get the various factions to stop bickering and start paying workers in hardhats to move dirt and pour concrete. This session, I will support changes to that regional plan and other reforms to get our state moving again.



Help for small businesses

Small businesses create the most jobs, but big businesses are the ones that get all the tax breaks and attention.

To create more jobs, I support reforms helping small businesses (1) offer health coverage to workers (2) streamline paperwork and permits so they don’t strangle new businesses, and (3) get a bigger B&O tax exemption.

Healthcare

It’s not right that folks with full-time jobs can’t afford health coverage for their families – not when their tax dollars are paying the bill for free health care for convicted rapists and child molesters in the state pen at Walla Walla.

I support strong reforms to make health care more affordable for all families and businesses in Washington state.



Cheaper medicines from Canada

Why should you pay double or triple for the same exact prescription drug?

Citizens and taxpayers can save millions by buying prescription medicines from Canada, and this is a case where we can pay less while getting more.



Take a machete to all the red tape

Ask your doctor about paperwork. Most doctors have to pay a full-time worker who spends all day wrestling with piles of paperwork from all the different HMO’s and government programs. It’s a nightmare.

Experts say paperwork and administration costs eat up 30 cents of every dollar you spend on health care. That makes the federal government look efficient, since Medicare spends 2 cents on administration and 98 cents on health care for patients.

We have to pass strong reforms to slice through all this red tape before it strangles our health care system.